Spinoza's Definition of Faith

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One of the most pivotal yet under-examined moments in Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (*TTP*) is his attempt, in Chapter 14, to define the notion of 'faith' (*fides*).[1] In Edwin Curley's recent translation of the *TTP*, the definition reads:

> [Faith is] thinking such things about God that if you had no knowledge of them, obedience to God would be destroyed, whereas if you are obedient to God, you necessarily have these thoughts. (14 [13], G iii. 175)

Spinoza says that the definition follows 'by reason alone' from the essential command of Scripture: to be obedient, that is, to act toward one's neighbor with justice and charity, or lovingkindness (*charitas*). According to Spinoza, defining faith is necessary for elucidating the kinds of beliefs we are bound to have insofar as we obey Scripture's command. Thus, he maintains, for the definition to fulfill its purpose it must lead us to determine the tenets of a universal faith—the core beliefs for which obedience serves as a standard (14 [9-12]). Spinoza assigns to the definition an indispensable role within the *TTP*. For, he argues, it enables us 'to separate faith from Philosophy, which was the main purpose of this whole work' (14 [5], G iii. 174).

How did Spinoza understand his definition of faith, its place in the discussion of Chapter 14, and its broader significance in the argument of the *TTP*? The first and foremost obstacle to

[1] For titles and editions of Spinoza's works I follow the abbreviations at the front of this volume. Passages from the *TTP* are cited by chapter and paragraph number, omitting the title abbreviation. Unless modified, all English translations are from C. For the Latin text of Spinoza's writings, I rely on G, cited by volume, page, and (where necessary) line number(s).

answering this question is posed by the definition's distinctly awkward formulation. We currently lack a commentary that explains, in terms of the definition's precise wording, Spinoza's argument about faith in the *TTP* and its wider implications. Yet understanding Spinoza's views on faith in this way is crucial. For without a cogent grasp of the structure and meaning of the definition, the relationship Spinoza posits between faith and obedience, as well as the rationale and function of his list of doctrines of universal faith, can only be reconstructed piecemeal out of assorted—if illuminating—bits of historical context and the puzzling accretion of remarks that Spinoza makes about these topics. Further, and perhaps most significantly, without this comprehension it remains difficult to pin down how Spinoza's discussion of faith grounds—and is not a mere prolegomenon to—his argument for the separation between faith and philosophy. In this essay, I grapple directly with the definition's strange wording to see what sort of message about faith and its essential relation to obedience can be extracted from it. In this way, I hope to reveal in higher resolution how Spinoza thought his definition fulfills its stated purpose of underwriting the claim that philosophy and faith are mutually independent—the main thesis of the *TTP*.

In section 1, I reconstruct the meaning of the definition by closely analyzing the relationship between its terminology and logical structure. I argue that, formally, the definition specifies obedience as a sufficient condition on faith (and not the reverse, as many commentators have implied). This exposes the definition's underlying message: faith concerns the obligatory status of our thoughts about God. These thoughts must be intrinsically obedience-motivating on account of their representing God as an authority over our actions. Hence, *if* you are properly obedient, *then* you are driven by obedience-motivating thoughts, and these thoughts represent God as the authority from whom your motivation derives. This entails that the dogmas of

universal faith are intended to be—and indeed are so laid out—as exemplars of what such thoughts look like, to the extent that we are motivated to act on their authority as God's revelation. In arguing for this result, I challenge certain widespread assumptions concerning Spinoza's conception of the relation between faith and obedience and of the purpose of the dogmas.

If this interpretation is correct, then according to Spinoza, representing God's commands in a way that moves you to obedience is necessary for being properly obedient to God. But Spinoza also indicates that in representing these commands as God's, we must perceive the content of God's revelation as true. And here the story gets complicated. At a crucial juncture in Chapter 14, as I discuss in section 2, Spinoza appears committed to two inconsistent claims. The inconsistency is evinced by his telling reliance in a key passage on the term *amplecti*, translated by Curley as 'accepting' or as 'embracing'. Spinoza often writes that we 'accept' or 'embrace' certain beliefs or doctrines. In this passage, he exploits the notion as follows:

> [F]aith requires, not so much true doctrines, as pious doctrines, i.e., doctrines which move the heart to obedience, even if many of them do not have even the shadow of the truth. This is true provided the person who accepts [*amplectitur*] them does not know they are false. If he did, he would necessarily be a rebel [*rebellis*]. (14 [20], G iii. 176)

According to this passage—call it the 'rebel passage'—one must embrace, or represent, pious doctrines as true, even if they are not, if one is to be obedient. In other words, 'the person who accepts [*amplectitur*]' the doctrines cannot 'know they are false'. Thus for the faithful or pious person, Spinoza seems to say,

(1) It is not possible to accept/embrace a (pious) doctrine *as* false but only *as* true.

Yet, in the last sentence of the passage, Spinoza countenances a surprising possibility: *if* a person who 'accepts' (*amplectitur*) a (pious) doctrine knows it to be false, then he is necessarily a 'rebel'. Thus, Spinoza seems also to affirm, in the case of the rebel, that:

(2) One can accept/embrace a (pious) doctrine that one knows to be false.

Between (1) and (2), it appears, in relation to some pious belief, both that one *cannot accept* it as false and that one *can accept* it while knowing that it is false. Yet how could the same meaning of '*amplecti*'—here rendered as 'accepting'—allow for the possibility of (1) and (2)?

In this context and across others, I argue, Spinoza consciously exploits a twofold sense of '*amplecti*'. In its standard use, the term denotes what I shall label the *embracing* of a belief, thought, or doctrine, the impetus to act on which absorbs the representation of it as true. Here, confession of such a belief is justified, not because the belief is true—one does not know it to be, and indeed it may not be—but because one is moved to obey in virtue of the fact that one does confess it.[2] In embracing a belief, one does not just accept the belief as true but is also prepared to *represent oneself as* accepting it as true through acts of obedience. If one's acceptance of a belief satisfies the latter condition, then one accepts it in the robust sense of embracing it.

Yet Spinoza also implies, less overtly, that one can adopt a *noncommittal* stance toward a belief as a thought or proposition that is represented as true. Let us call this stance one of *mere*

[2] Confession in this sense is not merely illocutionary; for Spinoza, the only proper confession would be through works. Failure to *represent oneself as* embracing a pious doctrine through works entails that one does not (truly) embrace it. 'Confession' is not a common piece of terminology for Spinoza, but as it applies to his discussion of faith it should be understood according to the original Latin meaning of '*confiteor*': to acknowledge, own, avow, as well as to reveal, manifest, make known, or show (here without the connotations of disingenuity or irresolution sometimes associated with the act of auricular confession). 'Confession' in this sense is suggested by Spinoza in a few places in the *TTP*, such as in an illustrative quote from Josephus at G iii. 96. (Spinoza's discussion of miracles in Chapter 6 is also relevant.) He appeals to it more overtly in passages from the *Political Treatise*: see *TP* 8 [41], G iii. 342; *TP* 9 [12], G iii. 351.

acceptance. This notion is implied in the rebel passage if one interprets the notion of 'knowing' used to describe the rebel's putative awareness of the falsity of religious doctrines as 'knowing' in an epistemic sense. If so, the dilemma between (1) and (2) in the rebel passage brings to light a logical impossibility: it is not possible to know or affirm (in an epistemic sense) the falsity of a belief and, at the same time, *embrace* it as true. But, according to Spinoza, if you know or affirm (in an epistemic sense) that the belief is false, then you can still *merely accept* it, where to 'merely accept' it means to *merely acknowledge that it embodies a representation of an authority* that governs the thoughts and actions of those who embrace the belief in question. *Because* you merely accept this belief, you can *abstain from acting on it* as if it were true; you can (in Spinoza's idiom) 'revolt' against the belief as having authority over, and hence serving as a source of motivation for, *your* actions. In adopting such a noncommittal stance toward a pious belief, you may then be deemed a 'rebel' from the perspective of one whose actions stem from, and testify to, her representation of a pious belief *as* true, that is, from the perspective of one who does not *merely* accept but rather *embraces* the relevant belief.

The rebel passage thus yields, at a key moment in Spinoza's discussion of faith in the *TTP*, a crucial suggestion about the different ways in which the faithful—those who embrace—and the nonfaithful—specifically, the philosopher, who can merely accept—are disposed to react to, and act based on, their thoughts. Indeed, it is plausible that this contrast contains the key to understanding Spinoza's discussion of faith, as Spinoza himself indicates when he states that this passage 'must follow just from the definition of faith' (14 [21], G iii. 176).

The significance of this point about the difference between a committal versus noncommittal stance toward religious doctrine has repercussions for Spinoza's argument for the separation of faith and philosophy in the *TTP*. If I am right, this argument is not simply driven by

the adjudication of opposed stances on how to interpret the content of Scripture.[3] It is motivated by a basic insight about belief and its authority over our actions. And while this perspective undergirds the separation between philosophy and faith, it also—as I observe in the third and final section—brings them closer together than we might expect.

1. The Definition

> Here again is the definition of faith in Curley's translation.
>
> [Faith is] thinking such things about God [*de Deo talia sentire*] that if you had no knowledge of them [*quibus ignoratis*], obedience to God would be destroyed [*tollitur*], whereas if you are obedient to God [*obedientiâ positâ*], you necessarily have these thoughts [*necessario ponuntur*].

The wording of Spinoza's definition presents two connected problems. First, what logical connection does the definition posit between the notions of 'faith' and 'obedience'? Is obedience sufficient for faith? Is faith sufficient for obedience? Are the two mutually entailing? Further, much of what underwrites Spinoza's views about the logical connection between faith and obedience, as well as its substantive implications, is reflected in the clause, '*quibus ignoratis*', translated by Curley as 'if you had no knowledge of them'—knowledge, that is, of '*talia sentire*', 'such things' as one, in having faith, 'thinks' about God. For brevity, let us label this *quibus ignoratis* clause 'QIC'. The QIC gives rise to its own set of issues. Does the clause posit that we lack 'knowledge' of *what we think* about God, or, rather, of God *per se*, the object of such

[3] Chapter 15 of the *TTP*, containing Spinoza's most direct argument for the separation of philosophy (or 'reason') and theology (or 'faith'), begins as follows: 'Those who don't know how to separate Philosophy from Theology debate whether Scripture should be the handmaid of reason, or reason should be the handmaid of Scripture—that is, whether the meaning of Scripture ought to be accommodated to reason, or reason ought to be accommodated to Scripture' (15 [1], G iii. 180). The whole argument of the chapter is couched in these terms.

thoughts?[4] How does the syntactic position of the QIC influence its semantic role, and how do these features of the clause determine its substantive contribution? These questions about how to make sense of the QIC comprise the second main problem posed by the formulation of Spinoza's definition.

In this section I address these two overarching problems concerning the logical relationship between faith and obedience and the meaning of the QIC. An important distinction needs unpacking in order to address them. Critical, yet largely overlooked, is the appearance in Spinoza's definition of the terms '*ponere*' (to put/place/lay [down]) and *'tollere*' (to take away/destroy). Through the *ponere*/*tollere* vocabulary, the definition of faith embeds a distinctive inferential structure.[5] This structure serves as a guide for understanding how he spells out the logical connection between obedience and faith. Reflection on the *ponere*/*tollere* distinction further provides a technical basis for considering how the QIC influences the definition's wording and structure to set up the substantive theses about faith that Spinoza

[4] Strictly speaking, it would make more sense on the second alternative to take '*talia*' to refer to God's *properties*, not to God itself. Thus a 'thing' we think about God, when *God* is purportedly the ultimate referent of '*talia*', might be for example that God is omnipresent; omnipresence *is* not God, but a property we confer upon God—one of the 'things' that enables 'God' to be what we think about.

[5] The *ponere*/*tollere* (Dutch, *stellen*/*wechnemen*) distinction plays an important and multifaceted theoretical role in numerous and diverse contexts in Spinoza's writings, both early and late (see, among others, *Principles of Descartes's Philosophy* 2a2; *TTP* 20 [20]; *E*2d2, *E*2d5, *E*2p10cs, *E*2p40s2, *E*3p4, *E*4a1; and *TP* 4 [4]). We find it exploited in virtually every category of geometrical exposition in the *Ethics*: propositions, demonstrations, axioms, corollaries, and scholia. It is also employed meaningfully in more informal contexts, such as the subtitle of the *TTP* and the disquisitions of the *TTP* and the *TP*. The scope and nature of the distinction is a deep and complex topic and cannot be adequately dealt with here. But an account of the *ponere*/*tollere* distinction in Spinoza's writings, its historical context, and its philosophical significance should be regarded as an important *desideratum* in Spinoza scholarship. The only study of which I'm aware that draws attention the technical nature of the terms *ponere* and *tollere* in Spinoza, and specifically in connection with the *TTP*, is Aaron Garrett, 'Knowing the Essence of the State in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 20 (2012), 50-73.

intends to establish in Chapter 14. And with a proper understanding of the QIC, we will be able to appreciate the tension embodied in the rebel passage and the lesson about faith it reveals.

Let us make a first pass at understanding Spinoza's definition by grappling with its use of *ponere* and *tollere.* The basic structure of the definition rests on two clauses:

(a) 'quibus ignoratis *tollitur* erga Deum obedientia'

(b) 'hâc obedientiâ *positâ*, necessario *ponuntur*'

We might take Spinoza's use of *tollere* in (a) and *ponere* in (b) to intimate that (a) is a *modus tollens* and (b) a *modus ponens*. This is borne out by a careful consideration of the two clauses. Consider the first clause of the definition in Curley's translation, which includes the corresponding Latin in clause (a): '[Faith is] thinking such things about God that if you had no knowledge of them [*quibus ignoratis*], obedience to God would be destroyed [*tollitur*]'. This part of the definition may be read as suggesting that *if* 'faith' is *negated* in the appropriate manner—a manner significantly signaled by the phrase '*quibus ignoratis*'—*then* obedience is *taken away*—*tollitur*. The negation of faith can be interpreted as the middle term in a *modus tollens* that brings about the conclusion that obedience is negated, or not given. This implies a major premise stating that *if* obedience is posited, *then* faith is posited. Thus:

MT-(a)

Obedience → Faith

~ Faith

∴ ~ Obedience } (a)

Note that the major premise here is just what is asserted in clause (b): *if* obedience is posited (*positâ*), *then* faith, or thinking such thoughts about God, is given (*ponitur*). We can then take (b)

as the major premise in a *modus ponens* whose middle term, *obedience*, brings about the conclusion that faith is posited—thus:

MP-(b)

Obedience → Faith

Obedience
∴ Faith } (b)

The essential idea of this model is that in positing the middle terms of MT-(a) and MP-(b), the definition brings about the conclusion of an inference that ultimately describes the same conditional:

Obedience → Faith

One might have expected Spinoza's definition of faith, like any standard definition, to specify one or more criteria that are necessary and sufficient for faith. Yet instead, the structure of the definition affirms, precisely, that *obedience is sufficient for faith*. By invoking the concepts of 'positing' (*ponere*) and 'taking away' (*tollere*), Spinoza's definition says that in conceiving of obedience, one invariably posits, or assumes, the concept of faith: you can't think of obedience without necessarily thinking of faith.

What does this mean? As suggested above, '*quibus ignoratis*'—'if you had no knowledge of them'—through its negation of '*talia sentire*'—'thinking such things'—logically expresses the middle term of a *tollens* that brings about the result that obedience is sufficient for faith. The QIC is also our ticket to gaining a broader understanding of the latter claim: only through scrutinizing this clause can we come to grasp what 'thinking' (*sentire*) 'such thoughts about God' involves, what it means for one to lack 'knowledge' of them, and what are the consequences (for faith and its connection to obedience) of lacking such knowledge.

Lying at the root these issues is the following question: Does '*de Deo talia sentire*' refer to *thoughts* about God, or emphasize *God* as their content? In other words, what does the QIC say we must not lack 'knowledge' of in order to be obedient—God, as the *object* of our thoughts, or rather something relating to our *thinking* certain thoughts? The question is decisive. If 'God' were the subject of the QIC, then the definition would affirm that anyone who simply had no thoughts about God, or who had no 'knowledge' of their thoughts being about God, would lack any reason to be obedient. But then the definition would fail to establish a connection between being obedient and having certain beliefs. And this is the connection Spinoza clearly wants to draw. In numerous places he insists that determining the foundations of faith in order to ground our knowledge of our obligations is a matter of determining what beliefs every person governed by these obligations is 'bound to accept':

> [E]veryone agrees that Scripture was written and published, not only for the learned, but for all people, of every age and kind. From these considerations alone it follows very clearly that the only beliefs we are bound by Scriptural command to have are those which are absolutely necessary to carry out this command [to love one's neighbor, i.e., to be obedient]. So this command itself is the unique standard of the whole universal faith. Only through it are we to determine all the doctrines of that faith, the beliefs everyone is bound to accept [*amplecti tenetur*]. (14 [10], G iii. 174)

Thus it is important for Spinoza, in representing what we must have knowledge of in order to be faithful, to represent the QIC as targeting our *thoughts*. And Spinoza's practice in speaking of faith throughout the *TTP* indicates that he does intend to represent '*talia sentire*' as invoking beliefs, thoughts, or propositions we hold, or may hold, to be true.[6] In passages where

[6] As Daniel Garber points out ('Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?', in Charlie Huenemann (ed.), *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], 166-187, at 172, n. 6). As a matter of the definition's formulation, Garber highlights the fact that Spinoza's Latin in the last phrase ('*hâc obedientiâ positâ, necessario ponuntur*') does not mention beliefs. On this score, the mention of 'thoughts' in Curley's current translation of this part ('if you are obedient to God, you necessarily have these thoughts') is clearly interpolative. Curley's translation has the virtue of representing how the whole definition

the faith or piety of individuals—as opposed to their knowledge of God—is at stake, Spinoza typically refers, for example, to people's *praejudicia* (prejudices), *dogmata* (tenets, doctrines) *opiniones* (opinions), *perceptiones* (perceptions), *commenta* (inventions), and *speculationes* (speculations). The doctrines of the universal faith themselves would qualify as thoughts about God, as the following passages indicate: 'We can judge no one faithful or unfaithful except from their works. If the works are good, they are still faithful, however much they may disagree with other faithful people in their doctrines' (14 [16], G iii. 175); 'Since doctrines must be judged only by the works [they encourage], controversial doctrines can be pious in relation to one person and impious in relation to another' (14 [23], G iii. 177). In these passages, Spinoza says that we can *judge* a person faithful only through their performance of good works; but whether a person *is* faithful pertains to their thoughts about God—to the 'doctrines' they uphold. Finally, Spinoza even ties faith not founded in the Scriptures to thoughts that lead people to salvation: 'someone who is completely unfamiliar with these [Scriptural] narratives, and nevertheless has salutary opinions and a true manner of living, is completely blessed …' (5 [46], G iii. 79). In functioning grammatically in the definition to link the notions of faith, or 'thinking such things about God', and obedience, the QIC represents the crucial association between obedience and *thoughts* we think about God.

But what specifically about such thoughts makes them *faithful*? Let us approach this question once again from the perspective of the QIC, by examining two ways of interpreting its implications.

(i) For faith, it is necessary to 'think such things [*talia sentire*] about God', where 'thinking such things' involves merely having such thoughts.

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reflects the significance of the QIC; on the other hand, his rendering of the last phrase provides no corresponding English term for '*ponuntur*', thus obscuring the definition's logical structure.

(ii) There is some relation we may have to our thoughts about God, over and above simply having them, such that were this *relation* to be absent 'obedience to God would be destroyed [*tollitur*]'.

On the first reading, the QIC stipulates that if one is not obedient then one simply lacks certain thoughts about God. One might then think that according to the QIC, what we don't know are a certain narrow range of propositions about God; it is failing to represent *those* propositions that destroys faith. Such a list of propositions might be deemed to correspond to, or be reflected in, Spinoza's seven dogmas of universal faith. In this way, Spinoza's definition would state that so long as you hold this particular set of beliefs, you are obedient to God. This implies, further, that acting with justice and charity is merely the *effect* of believing those propositions or dogmas. Ultimately, such a narrow reading makes *faith sufficient for obedience*. This reading thus presents an interpretation of Spinoza's definition of faith contrary to the one I have proposed. Let us consider it in more detail.

Daniel Garber gives an especially clear endorsement of the narrow reading. According to Garber, Spinoza maintains that '[f]aith involves thinking things, that is, holding the opinion that certain propositions are true. These propositions are beliefs such that *if* you hold them, then you are necessarily obedient to the central command of religion. … [W]hat is important about the beliefs that constitute faith is just their efficacy in bringing about obedience'.[7] In particular, the dogmas of universal faith 'are the propositions which, if genuinely believed, that is, genuinely held to be true by someone, will guarantee that he will be obedient to the command to love God and his neighbor'.[8]

[7] Garber, 'Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?', 172.
[8] Garber, 'Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?', 175. Lee Rice, paraphrasing Spinoza's definition of faith, intimates that while beliefs with a certain content are necessary for obedience, *adhering* to those beliefs is what implies that one is faithful (see 'Faith, Obedience,

The principal virtue of Garber's interpretation lies in its neatness; it posits a literal connection between the definition of faith and the enumeration of the dogmas. Indeed, in suggesting that, for Spinoza, faith involves believing in a specific set of propositions, Garber's reading directly accounts for why Spinoza provides a precise and avowedly complete *list* of seven dogmas as representing the foundation of a universal faith. Spinoza himself emphasizes the exhaustiveness of this list just before enumerating the dogmas, presenting it as furnishing a sufficient basis for obedience to God: 'Only those doctrines belong to the catholic [i.e., universal] faith, then, which obedience to God absolutely assumes, and ignorance of which makes obedience impossible' (14 [23], G iii. 177). Garber's reading easily accommodates this and similar-sounding remarks. More generally, his approach underlines the importance of addressing why Spinoza provides a list of dogmas as propositions uniquely linked to the practice of obedience; why he presents a certain, purportedly minimal number of them; why he presents them together as forming a creed; and above all, why and with what justification Spinoza

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and Salvation in Spinoza', *Lyceum*, 6 (1994), 1-20, at, 3). This would indicate that, for Spinoza, faith is not necessary but sufficient for obedience. Samuel Shirley's rendering of Spinoza's definition of faith rests on a similar implication: '[Faith is] the holding of certain beliefs about God such that, without these beliefs, there cannot be obedience to God, and if this obedience is posited, these beliefs are necessarily posited' (Samuel Shirley [trans.], *Spinoza: Complete Works* [Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002], 516). So translated, the first half of the definition suggests that obedience follows from the *holding* of certain beliefs about God—not from the beliefs themselves or their content, which alone are necessary for obedience insofar as they are the very beliefs which must be held. Finally, Garber seems to make this same move an another essay, where he writes that 'the beliefs that constitute faith for Spinoza are *necessary conditions* for obedience: If you are obedient, then you must *have* [my emphasis] a particular set of beliefs that will support obedience' (Daniel Garber, 'Religion and the Civil State in the *Tractatus Politicus*', in Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Hasana Sharp (eds.), *Spinoza's* Political Treatise: *A Critical Guide* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018], 128-144, at 134).Thus, whereas the beliefs that constitute faith for Spinoza—what Garber equates with the particular set of dogmas of universal faith—are *themselves* necessary for obedience, *having* the beliefs, hence *having* faith, is *sufficient* for obedience. This is in line with Garber's interpretation spelled out above.

portrays this creed as the foundation of a universal faith. Any interpretation of Spinoza's account of faith in the *TTP* must grapple with these issues.

The success or failure of Garber's reading need not hang on how one chooses to tackle these questions.[9] But I want to highlight an internal flaw in Garber's representative statement of the narrow reading of Spinoza's definition of faith. Conceived essentially as an interpretation of the QIC, the narrow reading overlooks the ambiguity of '*ignorare*' as invoked in this clause and in key moments throughout Spinoza's discussion of faith in Chapter 14. Garber masks this ambiguity by translating '*ignoratis*' as 'disregards', explaining that to 'disregard' one's beliefs about God is simply tantamount to not having them.[10] But there are contexts in which Spinoza makes use of '*ignorare*' that are incompatible with this basic assumption. In the rebel passage itself, for example, '*ignorare*' is taken to pertain, not merely to the holding of doctrines *per se*, but to knowledge of their *falsity*; according to this passage, it is possible for us to think certain thoughts about God where thinking them involves realizing that they are false.[11] So, if '*ignorare*' encompasses the possibility of knowing something to be false, then the QIC covers a wider range

[9] For example, one might attempt to explain the features of and intentions behind Spinoza's list of dogmas by appealing to the historical, religious, and intellectual context in which he wrote, and to how questions of audience motivated him to present the list of dogmas in the way that he did. For some examples of this approach, see Carl Gebhardt, 'Die Religion Spinozas', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 41 (1932), 339-62, at 354; Jacqueline Lagrée, *La raison ardente: Religion naturelle et raison au XVII^e siècle* [*La raison ardente*] (Paris: VRIN, 1991); Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics: The* Theologico-Political Treatise [*Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Mogens Lærke, *Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); and Clare Carlisle, *Spinoza's Religion: A New Reading of the* Ethics [*Spinoza's Religion*] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021). Highly valuable contextual commentary can also be found in the explanatory notes to Chapter 14 in Emilia Giancotti Boscherini's Italian edition of the *TTP* (*Trattato teologico-politico*, ed. Emilia Giancotti Boscherini with an afterword by Pina Totaro [Torino: Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, 2007]).

[10] Garber, 'Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?', 172.

[11] In the passage this possibility is conveyed in the clause '…*eadem falsa esse ignoret*'.

of thoughts than those which—as Garber's translation of '*ignoratis*' suggests—we merely 'disregard'.

This has broader implications for what the definition of faith assumes about the scope of the thoughts that make us faithful. If the QIC targets a range of thoughts specified narrowly by content, as Garber thinks, then the only possible motivational route to obedience is through having (or not 'disregarding') thoughts with that content. In that case, however, no one would strictly obey in virtue of *their* thoughts about God. Further, it would be impossible to imagine more than one causal route, via separate affects and mentalities, to obedience. Spinoza, on the other hand, is quite clear that rendering people obedient is not the burden of what the dogmas themselves assert, but of the nature of *people's thoughts about* the dogmas and of the tendency of such thoughts to encourage people to embrace the paradigm of moral authority that the dogmas represent.[12] In overlooking these considerations, the narrow reading underestimates the richness of the QIC—the very foundation of this reading.

Perhaps there is a more robust way to make sense of the QIC. Consider the second construal of the clause presented above:

> (ii) There is some relation we may have to our thoughts about God, over and above simply having them, such that were this *relation* to be absent 'obedience to God would be destroyed [*tollitur*]'.

On this reading, if being obedient guarantees that we have certain thoughts about God, then, to the extent that we are (truly) faithful, there must be something peculiar about these thoughts that make them necessary for being obedient. I suggest that the unique feature of these

[12] Cf. 14 [32]: '[E]ach person is bound to accommodate these doctrines of faith to his own power of understanding, and to interpret them for himself, as it seems to him easier for him to accept them without any hesitation, and with complete agreement of the heart, so that he may obey God wholeheartedly' (G iii. 178).

'thoughts about God' that links them to obedience is that the *motivation* to be obedient is *built into them*. In faith, what mediates between our thoughts about God and our acting obediently is simply that our thoughts about God are intrinsically *obedience-motivating*. In the remainder of this section, I focus on how certain features of Spinoza's definition of faith indicate that this motivational element of our thoughts about God constitutes the relation we must have *to* our thoughts for those thoughts to lead us to obey.

A nuance in the verb '*sentire*' provides a route to this interpretation. '*Sentire*' (as used in an expression like '*talia sentire*') may have the sense of *to recognize,* or *to be aware of,* or *to perceive (something),* i.e., not just to contemplate, but to think *in consequence of mental perception.*[13] This connotation of '*sentire*' makes sense of Spinoza's use of the term in many places in the *TTP*. Indeed, it is perhaps most natural to see Spinoza's stated motivation for the enterprise of defining faith as involving this richer sense of '*sentire*'. Near the start of Chapter 14, he writes: 'To establish, then, how far each person has the freedom to *recognize* [*libertas sentiendi*] what he wishes with respect to faith, and whom we are bound to consider faithful, even though they *perceive* differently [*diversa sentientes*], we must determine what faith and its fundamentals are' (14 [5], G iii. 174; translation modified). Spinoza is here announcing his intention to legitimate and protect diversity in the way each person *regards* or *recognizes* faith for herself, not simply to validate our having sundry—or a certain set of—opinions or thoughts about faith.[14]

[13] See Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), **sentiō**, III.

[14] In his French translation of the definition of faith, Fokke Akkerman captures the sense of 'recognizing' God in a certain way in one's thoughts about God (thereby constituting one's own sense of faith) through the notion of 'attributing' to God certain 'characters': '*elle n'est rien d'autre que le seul fait d'attribuer à Dieu des caractères tels que leur ignorance supprime l'obéissance envers Dieu et que leur reconnaissance est nécessairement impliquée dans cette obéissance*' (Fokke Akkerman [trans.], *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus/Traité Théologico-*

Perhaps, then, the QIC harbors the idea that there are indefinitely many sets of beliefs that are sufficient for faith due to their connection to obedience, and—what may be implied by '*talia sentire*'—having some one of these sets as constituting one's own beliefs is necessary for one to be faithful. Further, because it is not straightforwardly true that some particular beliefs are necessary for faith, the definition cannot omit the QIC, which signals that it is necessary for faith that some given set of beliefs belong to each person such that *they* are in some sense acquainted with them, rather than there being a list of beliefs with which some will be acquainted *but not others*.[15] Notice that the definition does not preclude someone from *recognizing* faith in her own way even if she does not 'think' the same thoughts about God that others do, and even if she thinks that others' thoughts about God are *false*: '*de Deo talia sentire*' does not discriminate between (i) those who think certain thoughts about God and (ii) those who have thoughts about God by virtue of thinking the former sort of thoughts about God to be false. In this way, the philosopher can recognize or perceive *which* sorts of thoughts about God are obedience-motivating and hence 'faithful', without herself 'embracing' them. So it appears not to be the

Politique [Presses Universitaires de France, 1991], 469-471). According to Akkerman's rendition, obedience necessarily implies (*implique*) the recognition of certain 'characters' or characteristics of God, such that ignorance of those characteristics takes away or 'suppresses' (*supprime*) obedience to God. '*Supprimer*' may connote taking away or removing from a given point of view. So Akkerman's translation perhaps suggests that ignorance of certain characteristics of God takes away obedience to God recognized (by someone) *as* having those characteristics. Michael Silverthorne's translation of the definition reveals similar connotations, only in different terms: 'faith can only be defined by, indeed can be nothing other than, acknowledging certain things about God, ignorance of which makes obedience towards him impossible and which are necessarily found wherever obedience is met with' (Jonathan Israel [ed.] and Michael Silverthorne [trans.], *Theological-Political Treatise* [Israel/Silverthorne] [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 180). Silverthorne's rendering captures the link between recognizing, construed as acknowledging, and the manifestation of this recognition in obedience. Here we witness yet another shade of meaning in the term '*ponuntur*', translated here as 'met with', suggesting the idea of our *encountering* obedience (in someone) wherever there is recognition or acknowledgment (on the part of that person) of certain 'things about God'.

[15] For confirmation of this point and an expression of Spinoza's pluralistic view of faith, see *TTP* 5 [46]. I am thankful to Mike LeBuffe for discussion.

case that in order to be faithful, one has to have a *particular* (narrow) set of thoughts about God—although it still is the case that faith entails having thoughts about God that are obedience-motivating.

Reading (ii), I suggest, promotes the latter perspective by capturing the richer connotations of '*sentire*' earlier pointed out. Plausibly, '*ignoratis*' signals a kind of deficiency in *the way* we recognize certain things about God—in the perceptions we have involving God. Spinoza means that thinking thoughts about God that are relevant to faith involves being aware of or recognizing the proper *basis* of these thoughts. Spinoza's remarks at the opening of Chapter 14 flesh out this proposal.

> Anyone who indiscriminately accepts [*amplectitur*] everything contained in Scripture as its universal and unconditional teaching about God, and doesn't know accurately what has been accommodated to the grasp of the common people, will be unable not to confuse the opinions of the common people with divine doctrine [*divina doctrina*], hawk human inventions and fancies as divine instructions [*divinis documentis*], and abuse the authority of Scripture. (14 [1], G iii. 173)

We can clarify Spinoza's point here in a way that foreshadows his definition of faith. With faith, as this passage implies, we are dealing with a range of ideas or thoughts about God, such as those 'contained in Scripture'. One lacks 'knowledge' of these thoughts—as the QIC will stipulate—if one does not recognize them as having a basis in divine doctrine (*divina doctrina*). Here, obedience to God is destroyed, since one who indiscriminately, hence merely, accepts (*amplectitur*) whatever he thinks or whatever he finds in Scripture[16] fails to embrace—*amplecti*,

[16] This suggestion raises an important point concerning the notion of 'mere acceptance'. 'Indiscriminate' accepting connotes mere *passive* acceptance: here one fails to commit to a doctrine or belief through mere lack of motivation, awareness, or proper attunement to the content of certain ideas. This form of mere acceptance is distinguished from the notion of mere acceptance as arising from one's *conclusion* that one need not act in accordance with a belief represented as purportedly true, that one need not represent oneself as believing it, thereby confessing it. What is significant here is that *from the perspective of faith* it does not matter whether one's mere acceptance of a belief is passive or deliberate: either way, such acceptance

in the appropriate sense—the authority of the divine instructions (*divinis documentis*). Extending the meaning of the passage, obedience to God is 'posited'—'*ponitur*', in the sense invoked in the definition of faith—insofar as the authority of the divine instructions is embraced. These thoughts about God are thus—to apply alternative but related translations of '*ponere*'—*granted* by the faithful and *given* in actuality through their obedient action, namely, love of one's neighbor and performance of good works. Read alongside these remarks at the beginning of Chapter 14, then, the structure of the definition of faith can be seen to reveal that Spinoza locates the nature of faith in the way in which our thoughts about God motivate us to obedience.

Spinoza speaks in the above passage of people who subscribe to thoughts about God that lack the proper motivational component, a component rooted in the representation of divine doctrine. Interestingly, Spinoza intimates elsewhere that the motivational power of faith, because it is psychological, could fail to attain its goal of bringing people to act with justice and lovingkindness. Somewhat strangely, the view that obedience is sufficient for faith is consistent with the thought that there could be a situation in which someone has faith but fails to be obedient. The latter is not the general impression we get from Spinoza,[17] yet several passages in

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fails to live up to the standard of faith because it fails to motivate one to obedience. So embracing is universally opposed to (mere) acceptance.

[17] Indeed, the following crucial text seems to contradict this view:

> We can judge [*judicare*] no one faithful [*fidelem*] or unfaithful [*infidelem*] except from their works [*ex operibus*]. If the works are good, they are still faithful, however much they may disagree with other faithful people in their doctrines. Conversely, if the works are bad, they are unfaithful, however much they may agree in words [*verbis*] with other faithful people. For where there is obedience, there faith is also, and faith without works is dead [*mortua*]. (14 [16], G iii. 175)

However, upon a close reading I do not think this passage poses a substantial problem for the consistency of Spinoza's position. The issue here is not whether someone truly *is* faithful, but how we can *judge* them to be faithful or not. Spinoza is saying that because different people may hold vastly different doctrines yet still be faithful, or on the contrary hold the same doctrines yet differ as to their faithfulness, words (*verba*) are not a reliable indicator of a person's faith. We

Chapter 14 confirm the point; for example, 'faith by itself [*per se*] is not salvation-bringing [*salutiferam*], but only by virtue of obedience' (14 [14], G iii. 175; translation altered). There is, Spinoza seems to suggest, indeed a possibility that some faithful, yet disobedient person does bad works, and Spinoza even refers to this person's faith as 'dead' (14 [16], G iii. 175). This is significant in bringing out the importance of the motivational component of our thoughts about God. If by 'dead faith' Spinoza means to denote psychologically inefficacious faith, then a person whose 'faith' is 'dead' is one whose thoughts about God lack the *right* sort of motivational component, the right relation we must have *to* our thoughts for there to be any connection between faith and obedience at all.

It is no surprise, then, that Spinoza takes this relation to be intrinsic to those thoughts about God whose connection to faith he deems paradigmatic—the dogmas of universal faith (*fidei universalis dogmata*). The dogmas posit a fundamental relation between (i) subscribing to religious beliefs as part of a system or creed, and (ii) doing so *because* that system or creed expresses authority sufficient to *motivate* obedience. This is indicated, in the first place, by the fact that, for Spinoza, belief in any one of the dogmas is not yet faith. We must accept that the reason for believing *all* of them is that they conduce to obedience, independently of our knowledge of their truth: '[n]o one can fail to be aware [*ignorare*] that it is especially necessary to know all these things for men to be able, without exception, to obey God according to the command of the Law . … if any of these doctrines is taken away [*sublato*], obedience is also destroyed [*tollitur*]' (14 [29], G iii. 178). The doctrines together supply those reasons by

can only judge another's faithfulness according to the works (*opera*) that manifest their obedience, which is a sufficient condition of faith. And this is compatible with the fact that one can be 'faithful' without *performing* good works.

describing a God in whom we can and must believe if we are to have any reason to be obedient. Each of the tenets confirms just this, which, more fundamentally, they all confirm.

Interpretations of the purpose of the dogmas differ widely. Commentators have viewed them variously as the basis of a religion that may be universally adopted;[18] a 'universal', because inherently rational, system of beliefs;[19] the result of a reductive project replacing excessive theological commitment with a minimal, morally guiding *credo*;[20] a religious façade designed to placate the masses, concealing truths only philosophers would recognize;[21] or part of a political-pedagogical strategy designed to accommodate philosophical truth to the mentality of the common people.[22] There is a reductive element in all these readings, at least in headline form.

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[18] Or more appropriately, as some think, universally adopted by Christians. For some illuminating representations of the above view—each of which offer nuanced treatments that differ from and often engage with one another—see Lærke, *Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing*, 170-75; Alexandre Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza* [*Le Christ*] (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1971), 94-95; and Lagrée, *La raison ardente*. Curley (C ii. 587, n. 38) thinks that Spinoza is alluding to the seven dogmas of *TTP* Chapter 14 in referring, in the *Political Treatise*, to 'a very simple and most Universal Religion, such as we described in the [Theological-Political] Treatise' (*TP* 8 [46], G iii. 345). Curley elsewhere suggests that the dogmas represent 'the common core of the monotheistic religions which take their origin in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures' ('Spinoza's Exchange with Albert Burgh', in Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal (eds.), *Spinoza's* Theological-Political Treatise*: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 11-28, at 24.

[19] See, e.g., Lagrée, *La raison ardente*; Richard Popkin, *Spinoza* (Oxford: One World, 2004), 71; Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 268, and *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 159;

[20] See, e.g., Matheron, *Le Christ*, 95; Lagrée, *La raison ardente*, 9; James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, 189ff.; Michael Rosenthal, 'Spinoza's Dogmas of the Universal Faith and the Problem of Religion', *Philosophy and Theology*, 13 (2001), 53-72; Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 184.

[21] See Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982); John Christian Laursen, 'Spinoza, Strauss, and the Morality of Lying for Safety and Peace', in Winfried Schröder (ed.), *Reading Between the Lines – Leo Strauss and the History of Early Modern Philosophy* (De Gruyter, 2015).

[22] See Carlos Fraenkel, 'Spinoza's Philosophy of Religion', in Michael Della Rocca (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 389, and 'Could Spinoza

Ultimately, they suggest that the purpose of the dogmas is prescriptive: they provide a template of *what* we must—or what all can—believe *so that* we will be inclined to live obediently. These readings thus tend to posit a conception of faith as having a functional relationship with obedience, according to which obedience may be cashed out as a form of social benefit stemming from acceptance of the dogmas.[23] As Clare Carlisle has recently pointed out, however, this fails to capture how Spinoza views the intimacy of the link between faith and obedience: political cooperation, societal benefit, ecumenism, and even rational enlightenment, considered as external results of believing the dogmas, do not necessarily follow from the embrace of ideas about God *as* obedience-motivating. Merely acting charitably toward others—the purported consequence of each of these effects of believing the dogmas—is compatible with lacking any *intrinsic* motivation to do so.[24]

This point highlights a core problem with standard interpretations of the nature and function of Spinoza's *dogmata*: these readings posit too wide a separation between the dogmas regarded as the 'foundations' of faith and the corresponding 'standard' of obedience. Obedience, as Spinoza regards it, is a standard for *judging* others to be faithful; even though being obedient guarantees that one is faithful, it is not the *sine qua non* of faith itself. What plays the latter role are the thoughts that *motivate* us to obedience. Mogens Lærke insightfully points out that Spinoza does not refer to *universal doctrines* of faith but doctrines of *universal faith.*[25] This

Have Presented the *Ethics* as the True Content of the Bible?', *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, 4 (2008), 1-50.

[23] For a clear representation of this perspective, see James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, 211.

[24] See Carlisle, *Spinoza's Religion*, 239, n. 44.

[25] Lærke, *Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing*, 176.

means that the normative force of the dogmas is embodied in the *nature* of the thoughts they articulate, not in the fact that they are proffered as dogmas.[26]

Ultimately, the prescriptive, or narrow, reading of the dogmas, so widely adopted in the literature, is undermined by the way Spinoza conceives of the dogmas in relation to the definition of faith itself. We witness this in the same passage cited above as putatively providing support for the view that Spinoza's definition states that faith is sufficient for obedience, and hence that obedience is the external result of faith. Consider more carefully its wording: 'Only those doctrines belong [*pertinent*] to the catholic faith, then, which obedience to God absolutely assumes [*absolute ponit*], and ignorance of which [*quibus ignoratis*] makes obedience absolutely impossible [*absolute impossibilis*]' (14 [23], G iii. 177.8-10). Here, Spinoza is presenting a similarly worded gloss on the definition of faith, linking it particularly to the justification for his list of dogmas. This elaboration of the definition states that being ignorant (*ignorare*) of the authoritative force of the whole system of tenets understood as God's revelation destroys, indeed literally removes, obedience and thereby faith. Why does Spinoza add this gloss? The answer must be that although belief in the doctrines of universal faith is predicated on the definition of faith, such belief is not included in the definition itself because believing the doctrines is not the proximate cause of the essence of faith. We cannot affirm the nature of faith through any *particular* list of doctrines, and we cannot be satisfied that we've understood faith simply by confessing a list of universal doctrines as necessary and/or sufficient for faith. Yet, the definition does underwrite the universality of the tenets of faith insofar as *anyone* who would be faithful must accept a standard for, or be motivated to, obedience: 'Faith requires, not so much true doctrines, as pious doctrines, i.e., doctrines which *move the heart to obedience* [*animum ad*

[26] Thus Lærke: 'religious doctrine should not only guide our actions but also provide sufficient motivation for embracing them' (*Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing*, 184).

obedientiam movent], even if many of them do not have even a shadow of the truth' (14 [20], G iii. 176).

As we see from the passage just quoted—i.e., the first segment of the rebel passage—the function of Spinoza's universal tenets is to articulate such a standard of obedience; they are not just a collection of propositions we may hold to be true, but beliefs that move our heart to obedience. Yet what is the status of someone who *fails* to be moved to obedience by such beliefs? What relation do their thoughts have to faith? These questions, too, are suggested by the rebel passage, to which I now turn.

2. The Rebel Passage

Recall the apparently conflicting pair of propositions implied by the rebel passage:

(1) It is not possible to accept/embrace a (pious) doctrine *as* false but only *as* true.

(2) One can accept/embrace a (pious) doctrine that one knows to be false.

My goal in this section is to clarify the significance of the opposition between (1) and (2) by fleshing out the notions 'embracing' and 'mere accepting' that they imply. This distinction bears directly on our understanding of the connection between faith and the motivational component of our thoughts or ideas about God. Both in the rebel passage and in his definition of faith, I argue, Spinoza sees faith as necessarily defined by this relation. In the last part of this section, I show how the rebel passage and the definition of faith mutually express this necessity.

To begin with, we might question whether Spinoza is really committed to both (1) and (2). For example, in contexts beyond the rebel passage, he seems merely to assert (1). In the sixth of his seven dogmas, he writes:

> *Everyone who obeys God by living in this way [i.e., in love toward one's neighbor] is saved; the rest, who live under the control of pleasures, are lost.* If men did not firmly believe this [*Si homines hoc firmiter non crederent*], there

> would be no reason why they should prefer to obey God rather than pleasures. (14 [27], G iii. 178)

The addendum to this dogma—the last sentence—says in effect that faith only prompts obedience provided that the person who accepts the dogma represents it as true. There is no indication of the possibility that one might accept/embrace the dogma while knowing that it is false.

Shortly afterward, however, Spinoza attaches each dogma to a theoretical claim which he presents—though not in so many words—as a way of situating the dogma within a philosophical perspective (14 [30-31]).[27] That we may merely *accept* each dogma in light of the option to interpret it theoretically is indicated by Spinoza's stating that 'it doesn't matter, *as far as faith is concerned* [*in respectu fidei*]' whether we believe the theoretical propositions in question.[28] One implication of this contrast is that regarding the dogmas from a theoretical perspective strictly does not concern having faith in them, i.e., thinking of them *insofar as* they express the authority of divine revelation. It is only to the latter extent that we *embrace them*. To occupy the former stance of theoretical interpretation, on the other hand, is merely to *accept* the dogmas as a set of propositions.

Spinoza goes on to repeat that it doesn't matter 'as far as faith is concerned' how one recognizes or understands the dogmas, 'provided he doesn't *conclude* [*concludat*] that he may take greater license to sin, or that he should become less obedient to God' (my emphasis). By contrast, to the extent that a person accepts the dogmas as tenets of *faith* (*fidei dogmata*), he is

[27] Spinoza says that we have the option to couch dogma six's exhortation to obey God either in the imaginative belief that 'man obeys God from freedom of the will' or the (theoretical) knowledge that in whatever we do we act 'from the necessity of the divine decree' (14 [31], G iii. 178). *TTP* Ch. 4 offers a more extended discussion of such alternative ways of interpreting the notion of 'divine law'.

[28] Spinoza emphasizes the phrase '*in respectu fidei*' by repeating it three times between paragraphs 30-32.

'bound' (*tenetur*) to interpret them 'as it seems easier for him to embrace them without any hesitation, with complete agreement of the heart [*integro animi consensus amplecti*], so that he may obey God wholeheartedly [*Deo pleno animi consensus obediat*]' (14 [32], G iii. 178).[29]

These passages adumbrate a distinction which brings out the essence of the difference between embracing and mere accepting, namely, a distinction between embracing *wholeheartedly*, on the one hand, and, on the other, *concluding that we may take license not to do so*—with consequences that are inimical to faith itself. Embracing is something that we do *wholeheartedly*, and indeed Spinoza often links the notion of a wholehearted embrace of pious doctrines (e.g., '*integro animi consensus amplecti*') to the wholehearted practice of obedience (e.g., '*Deo pleno animi consensus obediat*').[30] This connects with the rebel passage and with my description of 'embracing' at the beginning of this essay. In the rebel passage, Spinoza says that a faithful person must represent as true certain pious doctrines, doctrines which *move her heart* to obedience: the suggestion of this person's *wholehearted* acceptance evokes the idea that she will be prepared to *represent* her avowal of the truth of these doctrines, even if she does not know them to be true, through acts of justice and charity—acts of confession in the relevant sense. The rebel passage therefore elicits the thick notion of *amplecti* as 'embracing'.

Spinoza's commitment to (2) and to the notion of mere acceptance must be more carefully extracted. This commitment is brought out in the way Spinoza characterizes the difference between piety and impiety, which in turn evokes alternative ways in which the faithful and the philosopher conceptualize the notion of 'sin'. Before returning to the rebel passage itself, I wish to elaborate on these points and to adduce one further piece of evidence, drawn from

[29] Here adopting Carlisle's translation (*Spinoza's Religion*, 181).
[30] Compare Spinoza's remark in the Preface to the *TTP* at G iii. 10.25-30.

Spinoza's perspective on the interpretation of Scripture, for his espousal of the distinction between embracing and mere accepting.

Spinoza equates 'piety' (*pietas*) with being moved to obedience, and 'impiety' (*impietas*) with what he describes as 'taking license to sin and rebel': 'we should say that a person believes something piously only insofar as his opinions move him to obedience, and impiously [*impie*] only insofar as he takes a license from them to sin or rebel [*licentiam ad peccandum, aut rebellandum sumit*' (13 [29], G iii. 172). His association of 'believing something impiously' with one who 'takes license from [his opinion] to sin or rebel' adds a layer of meaning to the rebel passage, with which it is connected through the notion of 'rebelliousness'. Here, the rebel, or one who revolts, is not merely one who *knows* the falsity of a pious doctrine and yet accepts it, but one who, *by virtue of his manner of believing, takes license* not to act obediently. Spinoza himself emphasizes this subtlety in speaking of the rebel not as one who *lacks* a certain belief, but as one who 'believes something impiously' ('*aliquid impie credere*') and thus believes it in a certain *way*. There is a way of *recognizing* (*sentire*) something in others' thoughts about God that *leads one* to abstain from acting on those thoughts in the way in which the others do. As the ascription of 'impiety' to this stance suggests, Spinoza seeks to reveal the difference between embracing and mere acceptance by representing how the latter is evaluated by the faithful or pious. Some of the deepest lessons of this approach are generated by the notion of 'sin'.

In passages where Spinoza discusses the notion of sin, embracing and mere accepting are brought into closer contact, making their differences more apparent. In the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza maintains that the faithful person and the philosopher interpret the notion of 'sin' differently. In one place, consistent with the character of faith, Spinoza defines 'sin' in terms of obedience: '[S]in is what can't be done rightly, or [*sive*] what is prohibited by law. And

obedience is a constant will to do what by law is good and what the common decree says ought to be done' (*TP* 2 [19], G iii. 283). More specifically, sin is viewed from the perspective of faith as a 'vice of human nature' (*TP* 2 [6], G iii. 278). From the vantagepoint of faith, mere acceptance is a *liability* expressed contingently in acts of concluding that one may 'take license' to sin or to become less obedient to God.[31] Precisely, it is acts of consciously abstaining from behaving piously on the basis of certain beliefs that is sinful insofar as such acts do not result in obedience. For the philosopher, however, this notion of 'sin' rests on a confusion of freedom with contingency (*TP* 2 [7], G iii. 279; *Ep*. 21, G iv. 130). '[T]he more we consider a man to be free', the philosopher argues, 'the less we can say that he can fail to use reason and choose evils in preference to goods' (*TP* 2 [7], G iii. 279). The philosopher's and the theologian's conceptions of sinning or choosing evil overlap to the extent that both represent sin as human nature gone awry; but whereas the faithful person sees such a possibility as a liability intrinsic to human nature, the philosopher sees it as simply the negation of human nature, or of human striving, something to which no one could ever *willfully* be led. To the extent that merely accepting a belief is willful, then, the philosopher would construe it not as the expression of a liability to take license but rather as the embodiment of a rational disposition from which he, like any philosopher, could never intentionally be led astray. In this way, the philosopher is committed to viewing mere acceptance not essentially as a contingent act but rather as a natural manner of forming beliefs based on his perceptions. As Spinoza writes in a letter of 1665 to Willem van Blijenbergh, 'our Freedom is placed … in a manner [*modo*] of affirming or denying' (*Ep.* 21, G iv. 130). We can understand the philosopher, then, as reappropriating the notion of 'license' to construe it as 'freedom'; in this light mere acceptance appears, not as a single mental act—a

[31] See 14 [32], G iii. 178.27-30 and 13 [29], G iii. 172.19-23.

punctual deviation, from the perspective of faith—but as a *stance* one takes toward one's perceptions, beliefs, or ideas, a stance one *owns*. The topic of sin is, therefore, important for appreciating the depth with which Spinoza understands the contrast between embracing and mere accepting and how it sets faith and philosophy mutually apart.[32]

Let me supply one further piece of evidence for Spinoza's espousal in the *TTP* of a noncommittal versus a committal orientation toward certain thoughts about God. This time the consideration is based on Spinoza's views about the interpretation of Scripture. The distinction between embracing and mere acceptance is embodied in the contrast between two ways of regarding the content of the Bible. The first is to read it in accordance with the 'accepted opinions of the common people [*receptas vulgi opiniones*]' (*Ep*. 78, G iv. 328a), an approach which inspires obedience. The second is to interpret Scripture in the manner which Spinoza adopts in the *TTP*, viz., 'to affirm nothing about it, and to admit nothing as its teaching, which it did not very clearly teach me' (Preface [20], G iii. 9). The difference Spinoza envisions between these two methods of interpretation can be couched as a general lesson: it is philosophy's prerogative to assess *whether* certain narratives in Scripture can be regarded as teaching moral lessons whose claim on our actions rests in their 'moral certainty' or perceived likelihood to produce salutary effects.[33] Philosophy can thus discern *what* the narratives tell us to believe

[32] The notion of sin parallels other religious notions in illustrating how the distinction between embracing and mere accepting brings out the difference between faith and philosophy, for Spinoza. The concept of martyrdom, for example, presupposes the notion of embracing in one's heart, and therefore being willing to confess, one's ideas about God. A philosopher, insofar he is led by adequate ideas, *must* merely accept—and hence not be motivated in his actions by—inadequate ideas of God underlying acts of martyrdom, since only such inadequate ideas could convince someone that, *per impossibile*, one who loves God can do something contrary to the preservation of his being or that of others.

[33] Spinoza designates the epistemic standard that philosophers apply to Scripture as one of 'moral certainty'. 'Moral certainty' is a complex notion for Spinoza, but it is prominently used to denote a practical yardstick for evaluating the authority of Scripture and, more generally, the certainty of what we can readily or 'clearly' perceive (see G iii. 253). See Lærke, *Spinoza and*

about what God commands; it can do so without bringing along the assumption that we are compelled to embrace these commands as providing the motivation to be obedient. By contrast, it is not the province of faith to determine whether certain doctrines or moral lessons are *in fact* God's command. One who is *already* faithful does not inquire into the authority of Scripture and *whether* embracing it is salutary.

We have now witnessed several ways in which the distinction between embracing and mere acceptance defines and fleshes out the tension suggested in the rebel passage between the person who embraces pious beliefs and the rebel; that is, more concisely, the conflict between propositions (1) and (2). Having provided a textual foundation for the distinction between embracing and mere acceptance, let me finally uncover the intimacy with which the rebel passage relates to the definition of faith. Michael Silverthorne's translation encapsulates this relation and validates the insights we have so far gained:

> [F]aith requires not so much true as pious dogmas, that is, such tenets as move the mind to obedience, even though many of these may not have a shadow of truth in them. What matters is that the person who embraces them does not realize [*ignoret*] that they are false—otherwise, he is necessarily [*necessario*] in revolt [*rebellis*] against [true piety]. (G iii. 176)[34]

Silverthorne's rendering describes the person *qua* pious as they would be *if* they recognized the dogmas to be false, thus foregrounding the tension between (1) and (2) that perplexed us at the beginning. Even if the pious person and the rebel must really be different individuals, Silverthorne's depiction of wholehearted embrace and 'revolt' as located in one and the same person accentuates the inherent incompatibility of these two stances toward pious belief. As we can now appreciate, this portrayal makes sense of the fact that Spinoza regards 'realizing' or—to

the Freedom of Philosophizing, 49-50, for a discussion of 'moral certainty' in general as well as its application to Spinoza's views on prophecy and the interpretation of Scripture.

[34] Israel/Silverthorne, 181.

invoke the connotation of '*sentire*' elicited above—*recognizing* the falsity of a pious belief as an act that is necessarily (*necessario*) inimical to embracing it, which involves being moved by the belief in the requisite way.[35] The rebel passage thus accentuates the absolute character of the parameters which Spinoza assigns to faith.

Crucially, the strength with which this passage characterizes what sets piety apart reflects the categorical nature of the definition of faith itself:

> [F]aith can only be defined by, *indeed can be nothing other* [*nihil aliud sit*] *than*, acknowledging certain things about God, ignorance of which makes obedience towards him impossible and which are necessarily found wherever obedience is met with.[36] (G iii. 175)

The parallel force and significance of the rebel passage and the definition of faith make it easy to see why Spinoza declares that the rebel passage (by contrast with all else that is written in the *TTP*) 'must follow just from the definition of faith'.

3. Faith and Philosophy

At *Ethics* 2p17s, Spinoza remarks that being able to represent the fact that two or more ideas are in tension should be attributed to 'a virtue of [the mind's] nature, not to a vice—especially if this faculty of imagining depended only on its own nature, i.e. (by 1d7), if the Mind's faculty of imagining were free' (G ii. 106). Thus, what is depicted as the vice of the rebel—accepting pious beliefs that one knows are false—in the context of Spinoza's discussion

[35] Arguably, the faithful may also *recognize* how embracing involves being moved in the appropriate way by pious beliefs, insofar as they represent that, in overt contrast with mere acceptance, embracing a pious doctrine is a *virtue*. This would be consistent with their evaluation, as represented by Spinoza and explored above, of mere acceptance as a sin.
[36] Israel/Silverthorne, 180; my emphasis. See n. 14, above, for further comments on this translation. It is worth noting that, unlike Silverthorne, Curley suppresses the Latin '*nihil aliud sit*', obscuring the unconditional character of Spinoza's definition of faith. Curley's rendering of Spinoza's lead-in to his definition tends to make the latter look like a mere proposal loosely based on prior considerations. See C ii. 265-66.

of faith in the *TTP* consists in the *freedom* of the rebel's mind according to the *Ethics*.[37] That the situation of the rebel should be evaluated in *opposite* ways by the faithful person and by the philosopher underscores the genuine incompatibility of their orientations toward pious belief. In their interpretation of and bearing toward their beliefs, the philosopher and the faithful person have 'nothing in common'.[38] Or so it would seem.

I want to close by pointing out how the different relationships which the faithful and the philosopher have toward their beliefs overlap in the ethical and political consequences they have. These observations stem from the broader questions that have fueled our discussion: What place does faith have within Spinoza's broader theory of belief? What does it mean for a belief to have authority over our actions?

The beliefs of the faithful have authority over their actions due to the way in which their representations of God as an authority motivate them to obedience. Acts of justice and charity are confessions or external expressions of beliefs held by the faithful for the sake of obeying God's command. The inability to embrace beliefs about God that motivate such confession

[37] The concept of the 'rebel' receives a further assessment in the political context. The rebel is cast as one who judges a law of the state to be contrary to reason and thus *disregards* it, constituting an act of sedition. Here, Spinoza seems to suggest, abstinence from acting according to the judgment of the sovereign is tantamount to acting *contrary* to the latter's decision and hence to the interests of the state (20 [14-15]). Interestingly, Spinoza takes care to single out this practical *consequence* of the rebel's stance as problematic, not the stance of mere acceptance itself: the rebel, he writes, 'is seditious, not so much, of course, because of [his] judgment and opinion as because of the deed which such judgments involve' (20 [21], G iii. 242). For a discussion of Spinoza's political treatment of the rebel, see Michael Della Rocca, 'Getting His Hands Dirty: Spinoza's Criticism of the Rebel', in Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal (eds.), *Spinoza's* Theological-Political Treatise: *A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[38] Here invoking one of many expressions Spinoza uses to signal the absoluteness of the separation of faith and philosophy (see Preface [27], G iii. 10).

would undermine the proper basis for performing these acts themselves. From the perspective of faith, the thoughts we have about God must govern our practice.[39]

A philosopher's beliefs have authority over his actions, too. In the present context, what has authority over the philosopher's actions is *the belief* that the capacity for mere acceptance is a 'virtue' that follows from the nature of *his* mind (cf. *E*2p17s, quoted above). This belief governs the philosopher's actions insofar as it disposes him to knowingly *abstain* from acting on beliefs whose causes are in themselves inadequately perceived, even while those beliefs exert their presence in his mind. So the philosopher does not need to represent his *thoughts* (to himself or to others) as obedience-motivating; he simply must have the idea of *himself*, as couched in his idea of God, or Nature, as the cause of his actions.[40] The philosopher, then, is not one who strictly *obeys*. Yet the philosopher's actions, like those of the truly faithful, are oriented toward the pursuit of justice and lovingkindness; insofar as he has knowledge of God, the philosopher will desire to do good and 'join others to himself in friendship' (*E*4p37s1). In this way, there is a sense in which the philosopher also 'embraces'—*his* desire to act with justice and lovingkindness is built into his idea of his own nature and of its relation to God's.

The philosopher, then, embraces his beliefs about God on independent rational grounds; he does so even in the absence of civil or religious authority. The faithful act with justice and charity to obey God's command, just as one seeks to be a good citizen on the authority of the

[39] For a rich elaboration of these points, see Alexandre Matheron, 'Philosophie et religion chez Spinoza', in *Études sur Spinoza et les philosophies de l'âge classique* (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2011), 389-406, at 400-403.

[40] One might see this alternative way of being governed by beliefs as characterizing the *philosopher's* form of 'religion'. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza envisions 'religion', insofar as it relates to a life lived according to the guidance of reason, as 'whatever we desire and do of which we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, or [*sive*] insofar as we know God …' (G ii. 236). For an illuminating discussion of this and other passages relating the conception of religion that Spinoza espouses in the *Ethics*, see Carlisle, *Spinoza's Religion*, especially chapter 9.

state. Consonant with this, the philosopher will never do anything that constitutes disobedience to public authority, yet his motivations are independent of any social or religious arrangement. The philosopher avoids doing anything that will weaken the social order on the principle that, if he loves his neighbor, he cannot seek to undermine that on which the neighbor's *securitas* depends. Although guided by different motivations, philosophical 'embracing' and faithful 'embracing' both result in the promotion of acts of justice and lovingkindness.

The distinction between embracing and mere acceptance connects faith and philosophy to Spinoza's political views in a way that reflects his larger theory of belief. In Chapter 20 of the *TTP*, Spinoza argues that we can live in peace with one another if we renounce the freedom to act solely according to our own decision (20 [14], G iii. 241). As Oliver Istvan Toth and Ursula Renz point out, this has a theoretical implication: actions follow from beliefs, but there is a metaphysical distinction between them such that our actions can be suppressed without our ideas being taken away. This is compatible with the identification of belief with action or volition as espoused in the *Ethics* (*E*2p49), because there the action which Spinoza equates with having ideas is the action of judgment itself. So, the philosopher may *judge* concerning the content of pious beliefs in a way that is consistent with her abstaining from acting in the manner of a faithful person, whose judgment concerning the same content intrinsically motivates her in turn to act in the corresponding way. Yet here the faithful and the philosopher have something more in common: neither can transfer *her own* judgment to another person lest she accept a condition of servitude. For, as Toth and Renz paraphrase Spinoza's point, one's judgment coincides so completely with one's being that it cannot be transferred to others at all.[41]

[41] Oliver Istvan Toth and Ursula Renz, 'Die Entstehung von Spinozas Urteilstheorie und ihre Implikationen für seine politische Philosophie', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 69 (2021), 633-645, at 643-44.

In this paper, I have offered two main arguments: that obedience is a sufficient condition on faith, rather than the converse, and that we should distinguish between embracing the truth of a pious belief or dogma and merely accepting it. Let me complete my account with the following observation. I have suggested that faith, and how it differs from philosophy, is fundamentally linked to the notion of authority. Yet Spinoza uses the term '*fides*', in some contexts, to denote 'trust', 'honesty' or 'good faith'. And in these related senses *fides* is tied not to the representation of authority but rather to the expression of *authenticity*, as when Spinoza speaks of '*veracitas animi*', or 'authenticity of heart'.[42] This notion may be thought to relate to the sort of trust the truly faithful have when they treat one another with justice and charity. In this way, the notion of *fides* is a determination of the concept of *religio*; if the latter denotes the practical standard of acting toward one's neighbor with justice and charity, then faith denotes trust *among* the truly religious that they will, and do, uphold this standard.[43] This, then, is another expression of the absorptive—not merely causal or instrumental—nature of the connection between faith and obedience which I propose Spinoza is driving at in the *TTP*. And yet, although it in one way sets faith apart from philosophy, this absorptive quality also characterizes the philosopher's relation to his thoughts about God and his stance toward his fellow human beings. As Spinoza writes: 'the divine laws seem to us to be laws, or things instituted, just as long as we do not know their cause. But when this is known, they thereby cease to be laws, and we embrace [*amplectimur*]

[42] See G iii. 116.30. Concerning '*fides*' as 'trust' and issues regarding translation of the phrase '*veracitas animi*', see Lærke, *Spinoza on the Freedom of Philosophizing*, 281, n. 5. There is, of course, a sense in which authority and authenticity are intimately linked in faith; for the faithful, as Lærke puts it, '[t]he words of both the prophets and Scripture have authority to the exact extent that they are perceived to be authentic, or to the extent that they are perceived to genuinely transmit the word of God' (*Spinoza on the Freedom of Philosophizing*, 91).

[43] Thanks to Benedetta Catoni for discussion.

them not as laws, but as eternal truths. That is, obedience passes into love, which proceeds from true knowledge as necessarily as light does from the sun' (16 [annotation 34], G iii. 264).[44]

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